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European Linked to Illegal Acts Shielded by C.I.A.

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 7 — Over the last two decades, Alfred J. Bühler, a lawyer and businessman from Liechtenstein, has been connected in interviews and documents with stock and tax fraud, illegal arms deals, kidnapping and questionable overseas payments on behalf of American corporations. But the Central Intelligence Agency has prevented law-enforcement authorities from even questioning him.

Some of the reports of Mr. Bühler's activities, including disguising financial transactions for governments, companies and criminals, are in public records and sworn testimony. Law-enforcement officials in the United States and Canada and sources in Liechtenstein have provided other details. But Mr. Bühler and the C.I.A. have refused to respond to oral and written inquiries about their relationship.

Thus, the extent to which his business activities overlap his involvement with the intelligence agency is not clear. The relationship raises questions about how much the agency knew about or was even involved in various financial and political scandals, and it illustrates the conflict that arises from time to time between the C.I.A. and law-enforcement authorities.

The intelligence agency's interest in Mr. Bühler can be seen in an episode related by former law-enforcement officials that occurred on Feb. 9, 1967.

The United States Customs Service had Mr. Bühler's name on its watch list, and when he arrived in New York that day, the agency immediately alerted the Internal Revenue Service.

Two I.R.S. agents went to Suite 2400 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and served Mr. Bühler with a subpoena. It ordered him to testify the next day before a Federal grand jury that was investigating organized crime and the use of Swiss bank accounts and Liechtenstein establishments in financial fraud.

Mr. Bühler, however, telephoned a C.I.A. contact in Washington, and the agency helped him to flee the country through Florida and the Bahamas.

In addition, Lawrence Houston, then the intelligence agency's general counsel, flew to New York to tell law-enforcement officials to stay away from Mr. Bühler because he worked for the agency.

Nonetheless, Mr. Bühler was cited for civil contempt a year later, on Feb. 9, 1968, by a Federal district judge. Later, the grand jury named him as an undicted co-conspirator in a large tax fraud case.

Never Charged With a Crime

This was not the only time Mr. Bühler's name had emerged in a criminal case, although he has never been charged with a crime, nor was it the only time the intelligence agency protected him.

The only available description of Mr. Bühler's work for the Central Intelligence Agency is provided in a sworn deposition by Ralph R. Kaminsky, an I.R.S. agent who retired in 1979. The April 1982 deposition, in a California lawsuit over real estate transactions, described Mr. Bühler as a "bagman, a courier and a paymaster" for the C.I.A. Mr. Kaminsky did not say in the deposition how he knew that.

Mr. Bühler told a reporter who left a list of questions last month at his office in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, "I am not allowed to disclose any information because of the attorney-client privilege."

The spokesman for the C.I.A., Dale Peterson, said in response to written inquiries about Mr. Bühler's activities, "We'll have no comment on the questions."

Range of Activities

These are some of Mr. Bühler's activities that were described in public records in the United States and Liechtenstein and in interviews with government officials and other sources in several countries:

Mr. Bühler was significantly involved in illegal or questionable payments on behalf of Page Airways and the Grumman Corporation in the sale of airplanes to Morocco and Saudi Arabia, according to Securities and Exchange Commission documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. In 1980 the securities agency dropped its investigation of Page at the request of the C.I.A., according to Federal officials. Law-enforcement officials interviewed said the C.I.A. never provided them with information on Mr. Bühler's ties to the agency.

He was also involved in payoffs and questionable payments abroad by the Lockheed Corporation, and he administered a company that served as an agent in West Africa for another aircraft company, Bell Helicopter, according to public records and former Federal and Congressional officials.

He figured prominently in the 1967 abduction to Algeria of Moise Tshombe, the former Premier of the Congo, according to Liechtenstein associates of Mr. Bühler and published reports. A 1978 book suggested, without attribution, that the C.I.A. was behind the abduction. The intelligence agency declines to comment on the matter.

He was involved several years ago in the diversion of British airplanes to Rhodesia, in violation of an embargo, according to Walter B. Wohlwend, the editor of the Liechtenstein newspaper *Liechtensteiner Volksblatt*.

Mr. Bühler helped a former Howard R. Hughes aide, John Meier, to launder some of the \$7.9 million that Mr. Meier was accused of bilking from a company owned by Mr. Hughes, according to Mr. Kaminsky, the former I.R.S. agent. Mr. Kaminsky, who headed the investigation that led to Mr. Meier's 1973 indictment on tax evasion charges, said the intelligence agency prevented the revenue agency from interviewing Mr. Bühler in the Meier case.

According to the testimony of an associate, Mr. Bühler had dealings with the Penn Central Transportation Company, which collapsed in 1971.

The associate, Ramon N. D'Onofrio, who has three convictions for stock and bankruptcy fraud, testified under oath before the S.E.C. that Mr. Bühler told him that "he had had some problems with Penn Central himself and that he guaranteed me in no way could" Liechtenstein organizations he set up "be pierced."

Public records indicate that Penn Central's collapse was precipitated in part by the diversion of \$4 million of its funds through various Liechtenstein organizations.

Mr. D'Onofrio also testified in his deposition that Mr. Bühler told him he helped "manipulators like myself doing illegal things," and assisted people "evading taxes."

Officials at the various American companies said either that they could not remember Mr. Bühler or could not comment about the work he did for them.

Problems in United States

Mr. Bühler's legal problems in the United States apparently began with the grand jury subpoena in 1967. Although some of the Federal court records relating to Mr. Bühler's subsequent contempt citation by Judge Inzer B. Wyatt are missing from an archives file in Bayonne, N.J., public records indicate that his fine, which now totals more than \$1.3 million, has never been paid.